

a supplement to videography

# cinema

**digital**cinema

| cinematography | postproduction | effects | animation | web | distribution | exhibition |

digital spike



# how

## a hollywood player

### KEEPS HIS

## independence

by george avgerakis

**D**ifferent strokes for different folks. For George Lucas, digital cinema means shooting the next *Star Wars* epic with the 1080-line, 24-frame, progressively scanned CineAlta format. For Spike Lee, however, the cinema verite of his two most recent joints—*The Original Kings of Comedy* and *Bamboozled*—required a different digital imaging solution: DVCAM and prosumer DV.

Lee threw down a serious dueling glove to any filmmaker crying the blues about having talent but no funding. Consider this moment when we shot the cover for this issue. We've got the Sony DSR-500WSP DVCAM camera on a tripod, fitted with a Canon 20x8 lens. On a nearby table, just in case, is a Sony DCR-VX1000E prosumer DV camera. Lee walks in. We ask him to stand behind the DSR-500, and on the way he picks up the VX1000 and winks: "This is it."

Lee's newest film, *Bamboozled*, is a story

about a black TV writer who wants so much to get fired that he creates the most racist program he can imagine—and it becomes a runaway hit. The film stars Damon Wayans, Jada Pinkett Smith, Savion Glover, Tommy Davidson, and Michael Rappaport. One particular photo from the production says it all: four videographers getting deep coverage with VX-1000s as two actors perform a scene. Lee sits on one setup with 15 monitors working at the same time. He's all eyes.

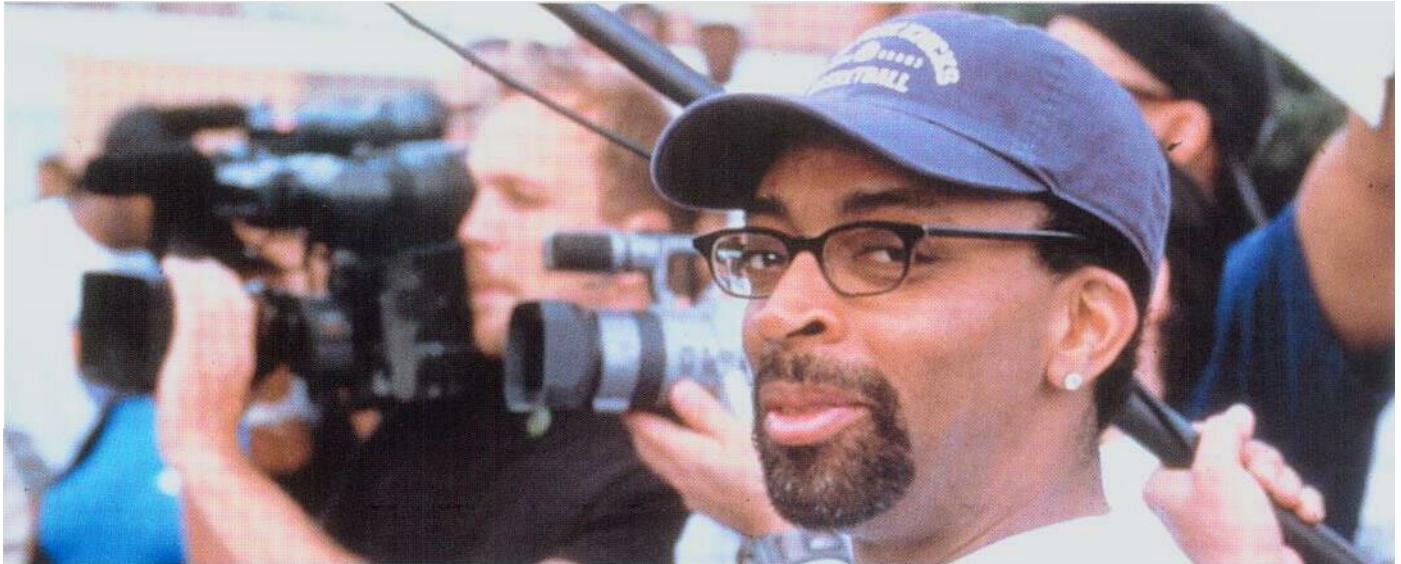
Then there's *The Original Kings of Comedy*, a concert film shot on two nights. It's based on a real tour of four "old school" stand-up comics who played every U.S. major market for two years, scooped \$34 million, but never made a blip on the white radar screen. Spike jumps, shoots—a \$3 million dollar budget—and next thing *Kings* is doing the multiplex in Grosse Pointe and all the newspapers give it ink.

Butch Robinson, Associate Producer on *The Original Kings of Comedy*, recalled that one equipment supplier they spoke to recommend-

ed shooting the film with a remote truck recording it in NTSC, and then transferring it to PAL DVCAM. "DCR-VX1000E's were originally suggested, but they won't genlock, and they can't be 'matched' by an EIC (engineer in charge) with CCUs (camera control units)," explains Bob Zahn, of Broadcast Video Rentals (BVR), in New York. "And since the event was a 'live' concert they'd need an hour-plus of record time."

And Spike needed a variety of lenses in an arena—some of them long lenses. I suggested they use DVCAM for the concert, but use the VX-1000s for B-roll."

BVR rented the production six 16:9-switchable DVCAM cameras. These consisted of two Sony DSR-500 WSP's and four Sony DVW-700WSP's. Lenses included one Canon 55x9mm, two 33x11mm, two 20x8mm, and a 9x5.2mm. Each camera was under the control of a separate CCU (Sony RMM-7G and RM-9P).



and each was linked with cable runs of up to 650-ft. to a Grass Valley Group 110P switcher, but also ISO'd on eight Sony DSR-80P and DSR-2000P DVCAM VCRs, with SMPTE time code jam sync (time-of-day, free run, drop frame).

The crew and director stayed in constant touch via Clear-Corn intercoms. There were repeat monitor arrays (Sony PVM-1354Q and PVM-8041Q) for Lee, Technical Director Andre Alien (Ikegami TM-14-20RHA PAL and a Tektronix 1745), the Engineer-in-Charge Tom Guadarrama and Assistant Engineer Bob Salzer, and a Sony PVM-8041Q monitor for the tape operator, Gary

But finally, MTV, David Gale, Van Tofler saw it, they bought into it, and then Paramount came in and got the distribution rights. So this film is going to end up grossing between \$40 to \$45 million, it's going to do a ton of business when DVD and VHS comes out.

So, because of people's blinding ignorance, they lost money for their studio. Just because they don't know the culture or never heard of these guys, they lost a great business opportunity.

**DC:** And by applying new digital technology with a lower budgetary framework you can take risks.

**SPIKE LEE:** We could not have shot *Bam-*

**SPIKE LEE:** That's happening already now with the Internet, where—you know—a lot of people getting into their work scene, short film scene, via the Internet. And when you're a young artist, you want somebody to see your work. That is the most important thing. Somebody has to see your work, and see something that's going to make them want to take a chance on you

**DC:** How do we get to this point? How does this little secret thing with digital video get all the way to Paramount and New Line?

**SPIKE LEE:** Malik Said (Director of Photography) shot for me on *Girl Six*. And we were thinking about that film: it was Malik's idea to shoot

## We're not for or against film or digital

Bartunek. Spike's four Sony VX1000's (originally used on *Bamboozled*) and two Sony DSR-500WSP cameras with Canon 15x8mm and 9x5.2 lenses rounded out the B-roll package.

We spoke to Lee about his choice of digital cinema tools.

**SPIKE LEE:** Walter Latham, the producer, the visionary who thought of this idea, it took him a long time to convince the studios to make this film, you know? They all said, "We don't know who these guys are," even though three of them had TV shows running. But I guess they don't watch UPN or the WB.

*boozled* on film the way I wanted to with the budget we had. So it was imperative to shoot it this way. But I think that what this technology is going to do is make this whole media thing more democratic. That anybody could buy a digital camera now, buy some tape, and make a film.

**DC:** Kind of a great equalizer; access to the means of production.

**SPIKE LEE:** Exactly. I mean you look at music, all you have to have is a guitar and a voice that don't cost nothing. But film, different.

**DC:** Well, do you see film going the way music has gone where you develop—

this film completely in video. And this was like four or five years ago; we were thinking about shooting it completely in video. Back then I said, "Malik, no, you're crazy."

And what we did was for all the scenes in the film where you see the male phone sex callers, we shot those scenes in video.

*Bamboozled* is somewhat about television, so we felt that shooting it on video might be the way to go. So once we decided that, it still came down to what format. Betacam we felt looked too much like video. And we looked around, and we liked the look of *The Celebration*.

